

THE GOOD NEWS

OF FORGIVENESS



On June 17, 2015 a young white man named Dylan Roof walked into a Bible Study being held at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. After an extended period of time Rudolph pulled out a gun and killed nine people, including the Senior Pastor Clementa C. Pickney who was also a state senator.

Roof's stated intention for this incomprehensible crime was to trigger a race war. But instead, people from Charleston, the State of South Carolina and even those across the US bound together to counter hate with love. Because of this very outcome he later stated that he had failed to accomplish his twisted mission.

Later at his sentencing, an unremorseful and disrespectful Roof sat in a detached state as many of the surviving family members of his victims expressed forgiveness towards him. One of these individuals, The sister of one of the slain pastors, Bethane Middleton-Brown said to Roof,

"I wanted to hate you, but my faith tells me no. I wanted to remain angry and bitter, but my view of life won't let me. You took someone precious from me, but my faith tells me she was a borrowed angel God called home. You can't look at me, but when you're alone you will hear my voice and see my face."¹

We stand amazed at such an incredible demonstration of forgiveness and wonder if we could do such a thing if one of our loved ones was murdered by a hate-filled individual. We even can doubt the authenticity of such an act because it seems so “other-worldly.” It is as if these people possessed a power beyond themselves to forgive the seemingly unforgiveable.

Forgiving others is tough. But at a more fundamental level we need to be forgiven. This is true because in a very basic sense, we share a common state of mind: All of us have felt guilty over what we thought, felt and done. On top of this, we have also struggled with a sense of unworthiness and brokenness. Why is this true?



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AN INSIDE PROBLEM

No reasonable person would deny the fact that guilt and shame are universal human experiences. Billions of dollars are spent every year on therapy and psychotropic drugs to alleviate the feelings connected to guilt and shame, with somewhat limited success. Some struggle with these things to such a degree that they have to be hospitalized. Others seek to drown out the voices of self-recrimination with drugs, alcohol, sex, work and even hobbies, only to find temporary relief.

Regardless of what one's strategy is to mitigate guilt and shame, no one likes dealing with the burden of having done something wrong or feeling permanently broken inside.

Why do we struggle with these twin soul-crushing weights? Some say that these feelings are triggered by violating socially constructed rules or religiously-inspired standards, which have been created to keep people in check. In other words, many philosophers, educators, and politicians have purported that if it were not for many of our unjust laws and freedom-inhibiting moral constructs people would not be oppressed. They argue that it is these things that bring false shame and inappropriate guilt.

Jesus Christ said something very different. In Mark 7 he was criticized because his followers didn't follow the religious tradition of washing their hands before a meal. He countered this superficial representation of guilt by saying that a person isn't defiled by what they eat or do, but by the presence of an inner-corrupted state in their souls (see Mark 7:14-15). When they didn't seem to understand, he further clarified by saying,

“WHAT COMES OUT OF A PERSON IS WHAT DEFILES HIM. FOR FROM WITHIN, OUT OF THE HEART OF MAN, COME EVIL THOUGHTS, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, THEFT, MURDER, ADULTERY, COVETING, WICKEDNESS, DECEIT, SENSUALITY, ENVY, SLANDER, PRIDE AND FOOLISHNESS. ALL THESE EVIL THINGS COME FROM WITHIN, AND THEY DEFILE A PERSON” (7:20-23).

Jesus explained to his confused listeners that every evil thought or deed comes from our preoccupation with and intent to do evil. With this he obliterates any argument that says other people, circumstances, environments, or even substances cause you to do wrong. We do wrong because we desire to do wrong. We are therefore doubly guilty for desiring to do evil and then doing it.

In a relativistic, highly individualistic society such a representation is typically wholeheartedly rejected. Guilt and shame in our postmodern world are false constructs to be torn down. True freedom, according to this worldview, is about finding anything you can do to bring prosperity, pleasure, and peace.

THE ONLY PROBLEM WITH
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The only problem with pursuing these things is that this strategy doesn't work. There is something inherent in human nature to suffer over what we perceive as wrongdoing. Most people feel badly when they lie, cheat, steal or injure another. This is so normal that psychologists tell us that those who feel no guilt for doing wrong are called sociopathic. These are people who are dangerous because they seem (at least to the naked eye) to have no remorse over doing evil, and therefore will keep doing it with impunity.

You don't have to be a sociopath to be in trouble. Jesus tells us that we not only have a problem because of the things we have thought and done, but we have an even deeper problem because of who we are. We are therefore caught in a serious dilemma: We not only feel genuine guilt over our bad behaviors but we also have a sense of shame regarding our penchant for doing what is wrong.



AN OUTSIDE SOLUTION

What we really need is a something that covers the wrongs we have done and remedies our broken state. We cannot do this ourselves, and no outside interventional therapy can bring lasting help. Then how can we be relieved of the guilt we feel for what we have done and the shame over who we are? The answer is that we need to receive the comprehensive forgiveness that only Jesus can offer.

Jesus knew that the greatest need a human being has is to be pardoned for our wrongs.

This truth is reflected in the story of a paralytic man whose friends lowered him through the roof a house in order to be healed. Instead of simply healing him and letting him go his way, Jesus said,

“Son, your sins are forgiven.”
(Mark 2:1-12)

At first glance, this seems to be counterintuitive. Most of us would say that the paralytics’ prevailing problem was that he couldn’t walk. But Jesus saw something else. He saw that the deeper root of his problems was that he was broken on the inside and needed to be healed by the grace of God. Because he had the authority as the Son of God to forgive sins, he demonstrated power over the deepest needs of humanity by healing the man. This exchange caused a great stir in the town. Why wouldn't it? No one likes to be confronted with their deepest problem.

In our therapeutic age, we look for all kinds of fixes for our sense of being flawed. We exercise, eat only whole foods, take a regiment of carefully chosen supplements and seek to maximize our sleep schedules. But no temporary remedy for our physical maladies or moral imperfections can compare to having all of your offences wiped clean. This is because one day we will die and we do not want to face our Maker with any lingering fears of bearing the inescapable weight of guilt and shame. Jesus came to bring God's pardon for our sins. But the gift can only be experienced by people who know they are needy and seek God's help.

This was illustrated on one occasion he called a tax collector to follow him. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews because they worked with the occupying and oppressive Roman army that made them pay for projects and governmental costs for which they had no say or representation. Imagine a terrorist coming to your residence, robbing you, taking over your home, making you wash their clothes, pay their bills and cook them dinner. Now you begin to get the picture of what the Jew were enduring in Jesus' day, and why they despised those who colluded with these enemies.

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To make matters worse, when this tax collector threw a party later that day for Jesus, the transformed man invited his less than desirable friends. Those who considered themselves holy scoffed that this so-called good teacher would spend time with such sub-par folks.

When they questioned Jesus on what they thought was a serious moral compromise on his part he stated,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

(Luke 5:31-32)

Only people who realize that they are sick and need the cleansing power of forgiveness get in on the incredible offer of total pardon.

THE GOOD NEWS OF FORGIVENESS IS
THAT IF YOU ARE SIN-SICK JESUS CAN
WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN AND SET YOU
RIGHT WITH GOD.



Paul put it this way when he said in Colossians 2:13-15,

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

This forgiveness is no mere superficial, legal transaction. Consider the following blessings of what Jesus did on the cross for us: God makes us spiritually alive; identifies us as belonging to him; forgives all of sins; and disarms the condemning voices of the enemy. True and complete freedom is offered to those who believe in Jesus. If you call to him for help from your great need out of his even greater mercy you will receive such a full and complete pardon that your very life will be changed from the inside out.

Who would refuse such a gift?



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questions



1. What did you learn about God (Father, Son or Spirit) and how he works?

What do you need to forsake and what do you need to believe?

2.



3. What do you need to start doing in the power of God today?

Who do you need to tell about what you have experienced and learned?

4.



REFERENCES:

1. ABC Team. "Families Now Have Opportunity to Address Roof in Sentencing Hearing." ABC News, 11 Jan. 2017. <https://www.abccolumbia.com/2017/01/11/families-now-have-opportunity-to-address-roof-in-sentencing-hearing/>